

156.

Death to the Christian an Object of Desire:

S E R M O N,

OCCASIONED BY

THE DEATH OF

MR. WILLIAM WILLIAMS,

PREACHED AT

KENNINGTON CHAPEL,

KENNINGTON LANE,

On Sunday Evening, March 25th, 1792.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM HOLLAND,

LECTURER OF THE SAME, AND MINISTER OF BARTHOLOMEW
CHAPEL, BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THOSE WHO HEARD IT.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED, AND SOLD AT THE VESTRY OF THE ABOVE CHAPEL.

M DCC XCII.

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of the world, instruction and discipline being of
the world, and worldliness, as it is called, is
the world's wisdom, and the world's
A. knowledge, and the world's wisdom is not
the wisdom of God. But if any man be wise, let him
use the wisdom which is of God. **1 Cor.** 3. 19.

S E R M O N.

PHILIPPIANS, CHAP. I. VER. 23.

**HAVING A DESIRE TO DEPART, AND BE WITH
CHRIST, WHICH IS FAR BETTER.**

MANY are the evils, and various the calamities, attendant upon a state of mortality. To meet these with fortitude, and support them with resignation, men have had recourse to the aids of philosophy and informations of science. But, however, these may afford some trifling assistance, under what are at best but imaginary troubles, they will afford us no solid support under the real and more weighty sorrows of existence.—In the solemn and important hour of dissolution, nothing sublunary can support the soul, or render pleasant the momentous period. Though,

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to

to pass through this important scene, be to all men allotted, yet how few comparatively are there who consider their latter end. To stir up you, and to call myself to the solemn recollection of this awful period, the present service is designed.

The sable habiliments that surround this pulpit, yon vacant seat, and the serious gloom on the countenances of several before me, seem loudly to call on each individual, in the language of solemn admonition, *Prepare to meet thy God..*

There is that in death which renders its near approaches to all, painful; to some, dreadful. But it is also a fact, that there is that in true and vital godliness, shed abroad in the heart, which can make even the stroke of death pleasant and desirable, enabling the soul to say, with the Apostle in our text, *I have a desire to depart, and be with Christ.*

In these words, we are called to consider—

First, The disposition of the Apostle's mind.

Secondly, The desire in which this disposition is manifested.

Lastly, Improve the whole.

First, The situation of the Apostle's mind when he uttered the words of our text.

Among the many things which, from the words, appear evident in the disposition of the Apostle's mind, we may name as the chief the following—

A happy sense of personal interest in a Redeemer.

From whatever source you and I may draw our comfort, or derive our support, in the moments of life, health, and activity, there is nothing but a sense of our own personal interest in a Redeemer, can stand us instead, or afford us consolation, in the solemn and important article of dissolution.

Were you to ask the Christian, what it is that animates his hope, strengthens his faith, and enables him to maintain his daily conflict, he would, with pleasure, tell you, that he had no other support but what arose from the pleasing humble hope, that he is by a spiritual union one with Christ Jesus.—In the solemn and important article of death, it will nothing avail us, that we have made an open profession of our attachment to Christ Jesus, and have had some consistent views of his Gospel, unless we can add to the whole the

knowledge that the Saviour manifested in that Gospel has been by the spirit of God sweetly revealed as ours.—When we take a view of the afflicted estate and condition of holy Job, and at the same time, survey the wondrous fortitude with which he sustained his sorrows, we feel our hearts glow with admiration of his conduct, and we are induced to ask with astonishment, from whence such conduct arose.—And do you make the enquiry? he answers it himself, I know that my Redeemer liveth.—This knowledge it is that animates and supports the soul of the Christian.

I know, saith he, that as to myself, I am altogether sin and pollution; but adored be the name of my Saviour; he hath loved me, given himself for me, washed from sin in his blood, and gloriously united me to himself. I, saith the Christian, though weak and unworthy, am a part of that body, of which Christ is the head; and, because he lives, I shall live also: my Redeemer hath delivered me from spiritual death; he has brought me out of the pit in which there was no water; and therefore I know he will keep my feet from falling, that I may walk before him in the land of the living.—There are, it is true, times when clouds and darkness encompass the Christian, and his prospect is dark

dark and cloudy: at such seasons, fear and anxiety, will too often possess his soul; but let him once enjoy the bright shinings of the sun of righteousness; let him once be enabled to trace clearly his title to heaven, through a Redeemer's blood, and he will, with the Apostle, desire to depart, and be with Christ, as that which is far better.—My fellow-mortals, is this portion yours, have you any lot or part in a Redeemer? Would you be resolved in this? Ask, have you ever yet felt your need of Christ? There never was, nor never will be, a soul interested in a Saviour's love, who has not been brought by the Spirit of God to see himself in a lost, perishing estate, without that Saviour.—Remember, Sirs, it is an interest in Christ only, that can make you happy in that solemn scene to which you are fast hastening. It is only a true acquaintance with your own guilt, a scriptural resting upon him, and a vital union to him, that can then make you happy. May God enable you to see the things which belong to your peace, before they are for ever hid from your eyes.

Secondly, *The Apostle here manifests much heart-weanedness from the world.*

The natural tendency of spiritual enjoyments and divine communications, is to wean the

the heart from the world and worldly things; and the more a man experiences of the love of God, shed abroad in his soul, the more he will find the things of this world fall in his estimation. There was a time when, like as the Apostle once did, the Christian reckoned much of earth and earthly things, its honours, its wealth, its pleasures, had their share of his esteem and attention; but now, taught by the best of masters, and educated in the best of schools, he has learnt to read vanity of vanities, upon all created good.—Having once had a taste of, and a relish for the spiritual banquet of a Saviour's love; having once been enabled to taste his sweetness, the prayer of his heart is, Lord, evermore give me of this bread.

He can now with pleasure give up all earthly honour, to enjoy the more distinguished one, adoption into the family of God; and to be called his son, is the highest honour his heart desires.—The riches of this world, which once engrossed the whole of his attention, are now estimated as dung and dross, compared with the unsearchable riches of Christ Jesus.—His former pleasures are now become tasteless and insipid; and he can only be satisfied with those pleasures that spring and rise from the presence of his Heavenly Father.—True it is, that at some times

times the Christian finds this world engaging too much of his attention, and laying too fast hold upon his heart, yet if he be a child of God, this will be to him matter of sorrow, and of prayer, and he will, with David, make both his confession and supplication to his Heavenly Father, saying, *My soul cleaveth to the dust; quicken thou me according to thy word.*

And here, my fellow-christians, suffer me to remind you, that keeping your heart as much as may be from worldly things, will, in no inconsiderable degree, disarm the king of terrors of his sting.—Here, let me pause for a moment, Sirs, to make the necessary enquiry, Is this disposition ours?—The lip of truth has made the assertion, ye cannot love God and mammon. Now, which of those rules your affections? Are the things of time and sense, or the blessings of salvation, held highest in your estimation? Where the treasure is, the heart is also. Enquire, then, where is your heart? A splendid profession of religion, without heart-weanedness from the world, will but little avail you; and the man that of a truth would become Christ's disciple, must esteem him before earth, its connections, its possessions, and enjoyments. *For, says our Lord, he that loveth father or mother, houses or lands, before me, the same is not*

not worthy of me.—The true child of God desires only the manifestations of his father's face, and leaves the rest to meaner mortals. His language is

Let others stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore ;
Grant me the visits of thy face,
And I desire no more.

Thirdly, *The Apostle here manifested a well-grounded reliance upon divine faithfulness.*

The faithfulness of God is his people's firmest dependence; and, like a sheet-anchor, it holds steady the Christian's vessel in every stormy tempest. Let but the child of God have comfortable evidence of his adoption, and be enabled to rest with confidence on the faithfulness of God, and you will find him more than equal to the powers of earth and hell united. The faithfulness of God is not only the foundation on which the Christian rests his future expectations, but it is also the source of all his present enjoyments.—The Christian, from a conviction of his many wants and multiplied necessities, would often faint by the way, were it not from the recollection, that the faithfulness of his God stands engaged to furnish him with a sufficiency of grace, that shall enable him to hold on, and to hold out to the end.—When God's

God's dear children take a survey of the enemies they have to encounter, and the difficulties they have to pass through, they would soon faint beneath the idea of dangers before them, had not faithfulness and truth assured their souls, that as their day is, so shall their strength be; and that they should be more than conquerors through him that hath loved them.—The faithfulness of God not only animates his people through life, but it supports them in death, by ensuring their safety for eternity. The Christian, resting upon the faithfulness of God, stands assured, that everlasting arms are underneath him, and that, in the moment when he most needs support, even when heart and flesh shall fail him, God will be the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. A faithful God assures the Christian, that in the dark valley he will be with him; that his rod and his staff shall support him.—The faithfulness of God enables him to esteem his lot, with all its sorrows, as far, very far beyond what the men of this world have to boast; and to account his light afflictions, that are but for the present moment, as not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in him; and he trusts the faithfulness of his God to fulfil his expectation, that when the earthly house of his tabernacle be dissolved;

solved, he shall have a house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

It is a fact, too plain for even the attempt of refutation, that man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. And the Christian well knows, that he is very far from being exempt from the allotment: but at the same time, the faithfulness of his God assures him of a state where sin and sorrow shall be known no more, where the tear shall be wiped from every eye, and the inhabitants no more say, I am sick. After this perfect, this glorious estate, his affections and desires go forth; and, resting on the faithfulness of that God, who has promised him these things, he has a desire to depart, and be with Christ, as that which is far better. It is this confidential reliance upon the faithfulness of God, that in a most eminent manner distinguishes between the true Christian and the unrenewed man. The latter, however bitter existence may be, parts with it reluctantly, and looks upon death as the grim king of terrors; the other meets his dissolution with a true cheerfulness of heart, and welcomes death as some kind messenger, sent to introduce him to the presence of his Heavenly Father.

SECONDLY, To the desire in which those dispositions were manifested.

Willing and happy, as the Apostle was, to wait his Master's time, yet he could not refrain from, at some times, indulging the desire to depart, and be with Christ, as that which was far better. We are here naturally led to enquire, What he desired to depart from? What he desired to depart to?

First, *What he desired to depart from.*

When the Apostle said, I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, he longed doubtless to depart from the present state, *as from a state of sufferings and sorrow.* To all men the present is a state of suffering and sorrow: to the Christian it is most especially so.—Many are the sources, and various the causes, from which arise the sorrows and afflictions of the Christian. At one time, bodily weakness; at another, family troubles; at some times, temporal, and at others, spiritual visitations, tend to inform him, that this is not his rest.—It is a common observation among men, that there is nothing in this world worth living for. The Christian feels this observation in its full force; by experience knows that a state of mortality is to him a state of joys and sorrows intermingled; and therefore he longs to arrive where both sin and sorrow shall end.

I know, says the believer (leaning on the faithfulness of his Redeemer) there is a need for all my afflictions, and that not one of my sorrows is useless or vain; but this I also know, that there remains a rest for my troubled spirit, where I shall have done with all my afflictions, and bid a last farewell to sorrow: after the possession of this, he earnestly pants, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ.

The Christian also desires to depart from the present, as from *a state of warfare and difficulty.*

The road of the Christian soldier lies through an enemy's country; and the consequence is, that his progress will not be a little impeded.—Though, by the power of his God assisting him, he is more than a match for his enemies, yet such is often his situation, that he cannot but tremble at their apparent power. Though, by the work of grace upon his heart, he, in the light of faith, has seen the nothingness, transitory, and dangerous nature of worldly things, yet he has often much reason to complain of it as a too-successful enemy.—Though Satan, he well knows, was a deceiver from the beginning, he too often finds himself imposed upon by him; and though he knows him to be a

conquered enemy, yet such is his weakness, that he frequently trembles before him.—Nor has he less reason to complain of his own heart, which his daily experience gives him to know, as deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. When the believer surveys these things, and adds to the whole the difficulties of his way, he cannot but long for that state, where both difficulty and warfare shall meet their final period.—The Christian well knows how dishonourable to his profession are his doubts and fears; and this induces him to long for that state, where he shall have no enemies to encounter, no difficulties to sustain, but

“ Where he shall bathe his weary soul

“ In seas of endless rest;

“ And not a wave of trouble roll

“ Across his peaceful breast.”

Once more; the Christian desires to depart from the present, as from a *state of sin and imperfection*.

Though much may have been done for him, he feels, to his cost, much of the remaining power of sin and in-bred corruption.—The child of God has frequently reason, with the Apostle, to complain of a law in his members warring against the law of the spirit; so that, when he would do good, evil is

is present with him. And though, with his mind, he desires to serve God, he has frequent reason, with grief of soul, to acknowledge, that with his members he too much serves sin. Though the law and reigning power of sin be subdued within him, by the power of divine grace, yet he still finds remaining corruptions, like the Canaanites of old, infesting the land, and disturbing his best enjoyments.—Even the first among God's dear children find too much reason to complain of coldness, langour, and spiritual deadness. The Christian finds sin creeping even into his best performances, and causing him, with bitterness of soul, to exclaim, “ Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death!”

Animated by the principles of affection to his Redeemer, he longs for a state of sinless perfection, where he shall behold his countenance, and serve him as he ought. I long, says the Christian, to be in that place, where I shall exchange ordinances for the God of ordinances.—I long for the place, where, freed from sin and imperfection, I shall no more have reason to bewail the deadness of my heart, the lukewarmness of my affections, or the stupidity of my powers; the place where I shall see him as he is; where that which

is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect appear.

There, from the fulness of his grace,

To drink fresh p' easures in ;

Behold the glories of his face,

And never, never sin.

This leads us to say something of what the Christian desires to depart to.—The Apostle tells us, it is a desire to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. I want, says the Christian, to be in that place, where no more intervening clouds shall hide my Father's face.—I long to be where he pours out the brightest manifestations of his grace and goodness.—I want to wear that radiant crown he has laid up for me, and not for me only, but for all that love and fear him.—I want to join that choir, where there is not one discordant note, but all is harmony and love.—I want to bow in his presence with gratitude, and say personally before him, Lord, what was I, and what was my father's house, that thou shouldest graciously look upon me?

Having a desire to depart, and be with Christ. It is the being with Christ, that animates the Christian's hope, and gives birth to the desire of his soul. This it is that enables him to look forward with joy ; and, without

without this hope, the Christian would be of all men the most miserable.—Heaven, to the Christian, consists in the presence and enjoyment of his Saviour ; and he can, of a truth, say with the poet,

“ Were I in heav’n, without my God,
 “ ’Twould be no heav’n to me ;
 “ And whilst this earth is my abode,
 “ I long for none but thee.”

It is far better, saith the Apostle ; and why ? Far better, because no more shall enemies disturb or interrupt his peace ; far better, for then his joys shall suffer no diminution, but shall be extensive and lasting. —Perhaps that state, to which the hope of the Christian looks forward, is best described by David, when he said, *In thy presence there is fullness of joy ; and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

Fullness of joy. Though the child of God is not without his joys in this time-state, yet they are at best but partial ones. There are times, when the thick cloud so veils his Father’s face, as to constrain him to cry out, *Where is he whom my soul loveth ? Hath God forgotten to be gracious ? Are his mercies clean gone for ever ?* But rejoice, my Fellow-Christian, in the remembrance, that thou art fast-hastening to that place, where both

both thyself and thy joys shall be perfect.— However, many weary steps may yet exist between thee and thy rest: to that rest thou shalt be brought; for said thy Saviour, *Because I live, ye shall live also.*

Pleasures for evermore. Here lies the grand distinction between the joys of the worldling, and those of the Christian. Whilst the former, like the sources from whence they rise, are short and perishing, the latter, like God, their author, are lasting and eternal. The laurel that binds the conqueror's brow shall ere long wither on his tomb. The name of the proud man shall soon be found only on the monument that covers his dust; and the possessor of wealth must soon forsake his high-prized treasure.—Not so the enjoyments of the Christian. So far from separating between him and his happiness, death will only introduce him to the full possession of his inheritance.

And do you ask of what enjoyments that inheritance consists? We can only answer, they are all his soul can desire; all his God can bestow.—They are joys which surpass at once the powers of description, or the conceptions of imagination.

All fancy droops at that transporting scene,
 All rapture's dull, all eloquence is mean,
 All thought's too faint, all colours cease to glow,
 All fire's too languid, all sublime, too low.

Can we then wonder, if, with joys like these before him, the Christian adopts the language of the Apostle, *I have a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better.*

This leads me, in the last place, to the improvement of our subject.

Remember, my fellow-mortals, that the providence we are now met to improve, is one of that nature which seriously concerns us all.—It is appointed unto all men once to die; and after death, the judgment.—From this final stroke, no state, no condition can possibly exempt us; nor can the arrest be delayed, no not for a moment.

Each day, each hour presents us with some solemn call, to remember that death is sure, and life uncertain.—But a few days since, he, to whose memory we now pay the last tribute of friendly regard, was, as we are now, engaged in the concerns of life: a sudden stroke arrested his vital functions; and, in a few hours, he was numbered with the dead.

dead. How soon may his lot be ours ; perhaps ere the passing hour has marked its appointed round, I, who now address you, or some of you who hear me, may fall beneath the stroke. Remember, mortals ! as death meets you, so you must meet judgment ; there is neither knowledge, wisdom, nor device in the grave ; and to that grave we are hastening.

Shall I entreat you, Sirs, seriously to consider, that there is nothing can then administer comfort to the departing spirit, but an ability to commit it into the hands of a Redeemer ; and those only can do this, who are washed in his blood, and cloathed with his righteousness.—An interest in Christ, my fellow-mortals, is that which will smooth for you life's rugged path, render pleasant death's gloomy passage, and enable you cheerfully to anticipate eternity.

Will you suffer me to conclude with an address to the aged, the middle-aged, and the young.

To the aged. To you, Sirs, whose heads are silvered o'er by time, what shall I say ? You have toiled up the hill, and are now going swiftly down life's declivity : ere long, with you time shall be no more.—Aged

sinner, suffer me to tell thee, thine is of all situations the most pitiable.—The eleventh hour arrived, and not yet hired in the vineyard.—Tremble, sinner, to death advancing, and for death unready.—Aged Christian, rejoice, thy warfare is almost accomplished; but a few more struggles, and victory shall be complete: but a few more weary steps, and then eternal rest. To an aged traveller, though thy steps are tottering, and thy strength is small, thou shalt, ere long, arrive at thy Father's house; he shall guide thee by his counsel, and then receive thee to his glory.

To you in the middle stages of life, engaged in its business and cares, I would say, *Seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all other things shall be added to you.*—Remember, none can so well support you through life, and make that life prosperous, as Christ Jesus. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom, and with all your getting, get understanding. You, who are in the morning of your days, and have the wide extended plain of existence before you,—remember, you are surrounded with temptations, beset with enemies, and have many afflictions to sustain; and at the same time remember, that an interest in Christ Jesus will bear you safe above them all. May the God of all Grace enable you

to remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil day cometh. Happy in this possession, you shall live above the cares of mortality; and when, in your advanced age, your frame shall grow faint, your eyes dim; when those who grow up with you into life, shall, one after another, drop into the grave, you will find this support you in the enfeebled hour, and create within you *a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better.*

Finally, Sirs, remember your mortality, think upon eternity. I have set before you life and death; may the Lord enable you to make your choice; so that, when you receive your last summons, you may bid it welcome, saying, *I have a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better.*

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Now, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be equal and endless praises. *Amen.*

H Y M N,

H Y M N,

BY THE



REV. MR. W. H O L L A N D.

I.

SURE, 'tis a solemn thing to die,
 To yield our mortal breath ;
 To close our eyes on all things here,
 And fall asleep in death.

II.

To bid a long, a last farewell
 To all that charm'd us here ;
 Enter a dread eternity,
 And dwell for ever there.

III.

Nought but a Saviour's righteousness
 Can then our souls secure,
 Open the gates of endless bliss,
 And make salvation sure.

IV.

Send down thy spirit, gracious God,
 Prepare my soul to rise ;
 Then shall I joyful hail the day
 That calls me to the skies.

ON an occasion like this, something respecting the deceased may be expected. Not honoured with a long acquaintance, much I cannot say: suffice it only to observe, that, as a man, he possessed honour and integrity; as a Christian, he was pious and humble. His piety was not of that ostentatious species, which courts the eye of public attention; but contented itself with the secret, though not less valuable, approbation of God. Such was his state, that, could language have found its way, I doubt not but his would have finished with somewhat consonant to the Apostle's views.

